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WEG-17

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Perle
March 27, 1961

Re: The Sino-Soviet Dispute and the Berlin Situation.

There are important differences between interests of the Soviet and the East German regimes on the Berlin situation. Moscow, although wanting and probably intending to intensify the situation at some time in order to attempt to force gradual Western concessions, would probably give greater emphasis in this context (as otherwise) to avoiding serious risks of general or local war than would the East German regime. Ulbricht is Stalinist by tradition and nature, and the weakness of his regime naturally inclines him toward repressive measures at home and toward major efforts to improve his prestige and position through extremist policies on the Berlin and German questions. There is considerable evidence that in 1959 and early 1960 the Chinese encouraged the East Germans in their desire for a stronger line on the Berlin question than the Soviets were willing to take. The Sino-Soviet controversy not yet having burst into the open, Ulbricht probably thought he could afford at least to flirt with Peking. Aside from covert material, there were at that time sufficient common propaganda themes on that question in the East German and Chinese press (as compared to the Russian) to make it seem likely that this was the case.

When, however, the Sino-Soviet dispute burst into the open, in the spring of 1960, Moscow rapidly compelled the East Germans to give up any indication of support or sympathy for the Chinese; since June 1960 such references have disappeared from the East German press. From what evidence is available we can deduce that Ulbricht (like the Czechs) supported Khrushchev completely at the Moscow discussions. Ulbricht has been the one Communist leader publicly to accuse the Albanians of supporting sectarianism (i.e., the Chinese) at the Moscow meetings. This probably indicates not only that he is as always (when lining up for or against Moscow is necessary) the most anxious of all the satellite leaders to please the Russians, but also that he wished to make amends for his past flirtation with Peking. All this happened after, (to Ulbricht's great chagrin), Khrushchev, subsequent to the failure of the summit conference, indicated in East Berlin that he did not intend to accentuate the crisis for the present.

Should the Berlin crisis accentuate, (and, since the Soviets will probably undertake something, it probably will), opportunity will again be offered to Ulbricht (and to Mao) to maneuver in such a way as to encourage the Russians to be more rather than less obdurate vis-à-vis the West. It seems unlikely, however, that the Russians will take serious risks of general (or even of local--interstate--war) over Berlin; it seems certain that they will take less than Ulbricht (and Mao) think they should.

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The probably increasingly serious Albanian crisis further polarizes the East European satellites. The Belgrade report (New York Times, March 19, 1961) that the East Germans and the Czechs have requested the Russians to send a circular letter to the satellite parties requesting their views on what to do about Albania is another indication of how completely Ulbricht is now an instrument of Soviet policy.

Nevertheless, a Berlin crisis per se might well, by intensifying general international tension, at least initially draw the Soviets and the Chinese closer together, since the Chinese (like the East Germans and Albanians) would welcome any intensification. However, were the West to maintain a firm position, the crisis will probably eventually accentuate their differences, since the Soviets will diverge again in policy from Peking and Tirana.

Conclusion: In addition to all the basic reasons for the United States continuing its policy of no concessions to the Russians on Berlin, the Sino-Soviet dispute offers one other: a completely firm U.S. position would in the long run be more rather than less likely to increase Sino-Soviet differences on this issue. It would also increase Ulbricht's discontent at relative Soviet moderation, and might even, within the context of any general decrease in Sino-Soviet tension (such as a Berlin crisis might initially bring), tempt him once again to seek some support elsewhere than in Moscow.

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